Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act Grants Program

Michigan

Partnership Receives a $38,500 Conservation Grant.
On May 3, 2004, as authorized under the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (Act), Steve Williams, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, acting on behalf of Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton, approved $38,500 in funding for the Variables Associated with Avian Mortality Resulting from Collisions with Communication Towers Project. This project is located in 20 counties in Michigan in Congressional Districts 1 through 15. The Act is nonregulatory and calls for voluntary partnerships to develop initiatives in the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean to conserve neotropical migratory birds and their habitats. Certain activities defined by the Act are eligible for funding, and partnerships must match grant requests 3:1. Contributions from U.S. federal partners do not qualify as match.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) estimates that 4 to 5 million birds die annually from collisions with communication towers, and other sources suggest the majority of those deaths occur at night, perhaps as birds are attracted to and become disoriented by the towers' lights. In Michigan, 77 percent of the species on the Service's list of Birds of Conservation Concern for Region 3 have died from collisions. Considering that approximately 5,000 new towers are erected each year throughout the United States, collision-related bird deaths nationwide are sure to increase if the causes are not researched and adjustments to towers made.

Last August, the Federal Communications Commission officially committed to addressing the topic and requested scientific information on the number of birds colliding with towers and on the relationship between collisions and tower variables, such as lighting, height, structural support, and type. The State also is interested in the topic, due to collisions occurring at its 181 new police communication towers.

Steve Maslowski/USFWS

Cape May Warbler

Project partners will collect data on collision-related avian mortality at 24 state-owned towers over the next 2 years, during the peak of spring and fall bird migration. Their expanded research, based on a pilot study conducted at six sites in 2003, will include tower variables such as lighting (strobe versus solid, high- versus mid-level, red versus white light), height (380 to 480 feet versus 1,000 feet), and support structure (guy-wires versus none). Using advanced radar-ornithology technology, partners will gauge the density of migrating birds moving past the study sites, in order to discern the relative number of bird deaths, not just the total number. Project results will help designers and managers of communication towers create or adjust these structures in ways that minimize or prevent avian mortality due to collisions.

Partners, including Central Michigan University and the State of Michigan, are contributing $198,960 to advance this project's goals. The study area is within the Southern Great Lakes Forests, Western Great Lakes Forests, and Upper Midwest Forest-Savanna Transition Ecoregions, and includes Bird Conservation Regions 12 (Boreal Hardwood Transition) and 23 (Prairie Hardwood Transition).

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